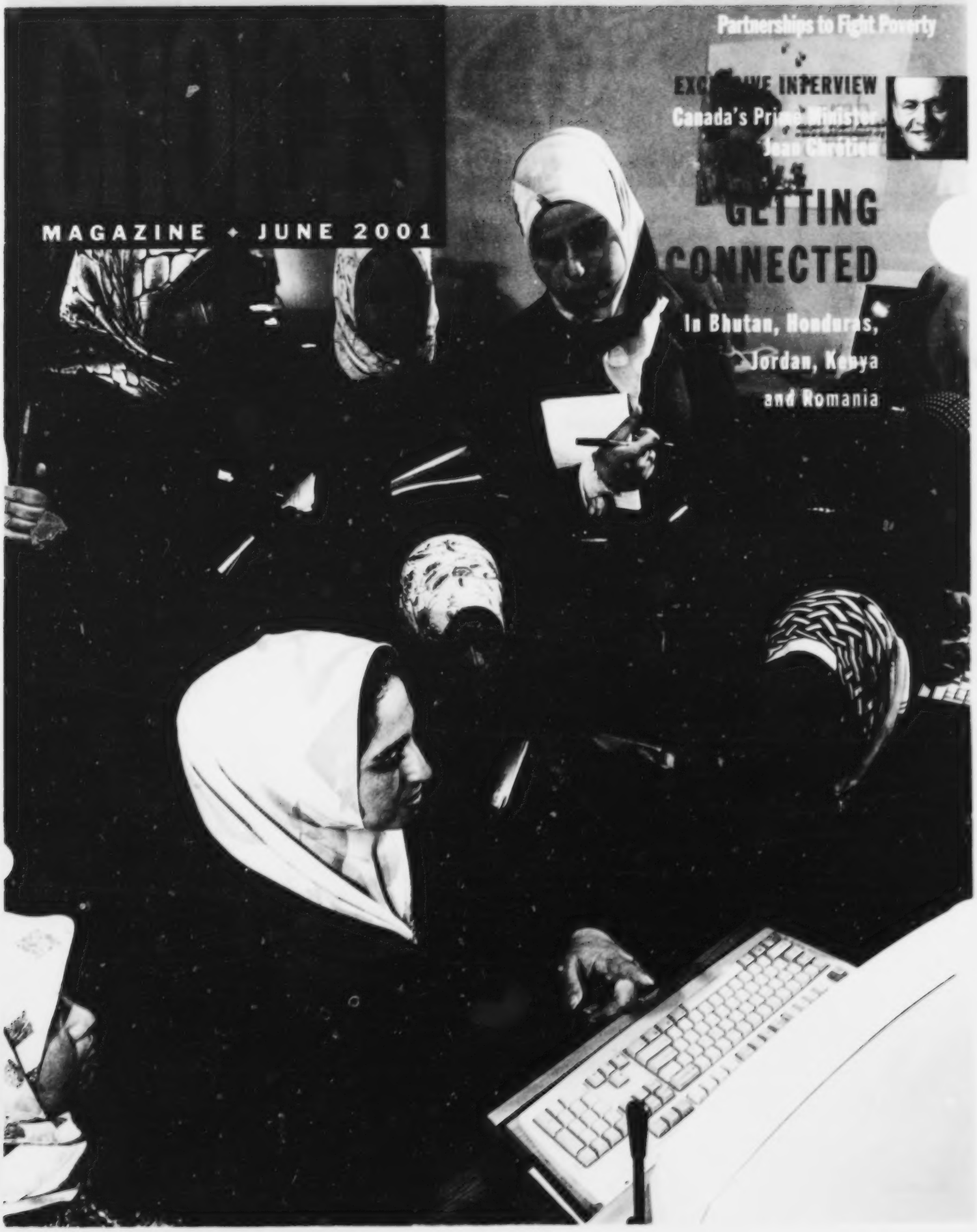

MAGAZINE • JUNE 2001
Partnerships to Fight Poverty
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
Canada's Prime Minister
Jean Chrétien
GETTING
CONNECTED
In Bhutan, Honduras,
Jordan, Kenya
and Romania

FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

It was an impressive group. We were expatriates, honoured to return to our homeland, Senegal, at the request of President Abdoulaye Wade.

Our mission: to share our knowledge and expertise during a brainstorming session to help Senegal address its development challenges. The President asked me to play a leadership role in the meeting, to determine how to activate the extensive network of Senegalese nationals working abroad to improve the country's standing vis-à-vis the donor community. One issue we touched on was how Senegal can foster better South-South cooperation.

During our discussions, it became clear to me that Spring-Summer 2001 offers numerous opportunities for the Government of Senegal to highlight its development achievements.

The African Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases organized by the Organization of African Unity in Abuja, Nigeria in April, brought together several African heads of state and was an important lead-in to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS, slated for 25–27 June in New York.

UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan, who proposed a global HIV/AIDS fund at the Abuja Summit, has urged governments and other partners to dedicate more resources to ending the epidemic. The June meeting promises to be a defining moment in the world's response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Mark Malloch Brown will serve as a panelist on an UNGASS round table on the "Socio-economic Impact of HIV/AIDS."

When the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States meet in Genoa, Italy on 20–22 July for the G8 Summit, they will also tackle HIV/AIDS and may make concrete resource pledges to help developing country governments.

But HIV/AIDS is not the only global issue the G8 will address.

Information and communications technology (ICT) will also take centre stage during the Summit, as the Digital Opportunity Task Force (*DOT Force*) —an unprecedented partnership between the G8, developing countries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to help bridge the digital divide—will present a report on its activities and findings.

The Digital Opportunity Initiative, a public-private partnership between UNDP, Accenture and the Markle Foundation, is supporting the *DOT Force* and has crafted a framework which asserts that ICT helps developing countries achieve their development goals and seize the opportunities of the new global network economy.

In this issue of CHOICES, we feature articles showcasing technology at work to help halve world poverty by 2015: rural electrification near Meru in Kenya; the impact of ICT on disease in poor countries; how the Internet is opening up the Kingdom of Bhutan; Internet centres for Bedouin women in Jordan.

UNDP is spearheading efforts to help developing countries harness the power of ICT. This summer, UNDP is expected to announce its cooperation with several countries, including Bolivia, Romania and Tanzania under the Global Network Readiness Resource Initiative, to help create national and multi-sectoral ICT task forces, design ICT strategies that address development goals and raise funds to support implementation.

To generate support for helping developing countries tap into the technology revolution, UNDP is launching an ICT thematic trust fund with assistance from the Governments of Japan and Ireland.

The centrepiece of UNDP's ICT work will be the July launch of the *Human Development Report 2001*, whose theme will be *Making New Technologies Work For Human Development*. The Report advocates new policies and incentives to enable the poor to take advantage of the possibilities inherent in cutting-edge technology.

The challenge of distributing the benefits of ICT is enormous. And the pay-off, for my home country and other developing nations, could be equally large.

Djibril Diallo

Cover: Jordanian students surround United Nations Volunteer Jenan Shafiq in Satawi. Photo: Bill Lyons/UNDP

Coming in September

CHOICES

Good governance has been called the "missing link" between national anti-poverty efforts and actual reduction. In September, CHOICES will explore UNDP-assisted governance projects in five countries where nuts-and-bolts policy-making is helping poor communities grasp the promises of self-development.

To advertise in CHOICES, contact Rajeswary Iruthayanathan (212) 906-5327 in UNDP New York or Ricardo Espinosa (41-22) 917-8316 in UNDP Geneva.

MAGAZINE • JUNE 2001

Volume 10 Number 2

Editor-in-Chief
Dahni Dalle
Editor
Stephen C. Rose
Managing Editor
Rajeswary Ivathiyanathan
Design
Ferro-Ferro Graphic Communication
Arlington, Virginia
Translation Manager
Elizabeth Scott Andrews
Production Manager
Maureen Lynch
Editorial Production Associate
Jennifer Prince
Distribution
Nora Perez
Shamsia Zaman
Special Adviser to the Editor-in-Chief
Nadine Gordimer
Advisers
Dianne Abbott
Sharon Capeling-Alakija
Mervin Ashcroft
Sandy Close
Inge Kaul
Geoffrey Lean

4 **Commentary**
Can ITC Address the Needs of the Poor?
By Mark Malloch Brown

5 **Interview**
Prime Minister of Canada Jean Chretien
On the G8 Summit, Aid and the Digital Divide

8 **Essay**
Deconstructing the Digital Divide
By Denis Gilhooly

GETTING CONNECTED

9 Wired in Romania: Children's Computer Clubs
By Alison Mutler

12 Isolated Kenyan Village Gets Connected
By David Dahmen

14 Bedouin Women Discover Distance Learning
By Sereen Juma

16 Can Information Technology Help Fight Disease?
By Andy Crump and Cathy Needham

18 Bhutan Joins the Digital Age
By Siok Sian Pek

20 Post-Mitch Networking Expands
By Kristin Helmore

22 **Viewpoint**
The ICT for Development Challenge: Rhetoric into Reality
By Rafal Rohozinski

23 **Notebook**
Netaid Launches Say Yes for Children Campaign
By Ian Steele

Computer Skills Empower Women
By Annie Brady

Witnessing the Impact of Partnerships
By Danny Glover

28 **Matters of Fact**

CHOICES
is published four times a year by
Communications Office
Office of the Administrator
United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
tel: (212) 906 5325
fax: (212) 906 5364
e-mail: choices@undp.org

The articles in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the United Nations Development Programme, nor do the boundaries and names shown on maps imply official endorsement by the United Nations. Articles may be freely reproduced as long as credit is given and tear sheets are provided to the editor. CHOICES is available in English, French and Spanish.

The printed matter is recyclable. Phønix Trykkeriet A/S, Aarhus, Denmark. ISO 14001 certified and EMAS approved.

Visit CHOICES: www.undp.org/dpa

COMMENTARY

Can ICTs Address the Needs of the Poor?

In both developed and developing countries there is still considerable skepticism as to whether providing access to information and communications technology (ICT) can play a significant role in reducing poverty. As Bill Gates noted, "Computers are amazing in what they can do, but they have to be put into the perspective of human values. And certainly as a father of two children, thinking about the medicines I take for granted that are not available elsewhere, that sort of rises to the top of the list." Or as one specialist in technology and economic-development issues put it: "Other divides are more important than the digital divide: the divide on health care, the human-rights divide, the education divide."

Certainly ICT cannot by itself bring an end to world poverty. ICTs are simply tools. And no single set of tools can solve a global problem with such multiple and complex causes.

But while ICTs are not a magic bullet, they do provide powerful ammunition in the fight against poverty. As with all tools, the usefulness of ICTs depends upon how they are employed. And there is now a body of cost-effective, country-differentiated and empowerment-oriented solutions, which use digital opportunities to address basic development goals. New technologies offer potent support to efforts to address the divides in health care, human rights and education.

In the area of health, ICTs are being used in developing countries to facilitate remote consultation, diagnosis and treatment. Across sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the Internet is used to monitor daily cases of meningitis and to help coordinate mass vaccination programmes when threshold levels are reached.

As for education, many organizations and vocational training facilities are employing ICT for distance learning and to train workers and even teachers in an array of functional areas. And through ICT, curricula can be developed collaboratively, and educational materials can be distributed and updated more cheaply.

In terms of political empowerment, ICTs can provide poor people, and the intermediaries who work with them, with new vehicles for voicing their concerns, organizing popular movements, and making governments accountable. For instance, last year in Yugoslavia, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including student groups, used the Internet to rally and organize support for the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic.

ICT can also help create jobs. The tremendous distance of developing countries from the major corridors of trade and from the major markets of the world has been a primary driver of the inequality in economic development that exists globally. ICT can make those distances much less significant. And for some countries, such as India, ICT may offer major economic opportunities.

So I am convinced that ICT can help us reach the targets established by world leaders at September's Millennium Summit, including the goal of halving poverty by 2015.

That is why UNDP is a joint host of the secretariat for the Digital Opportunity Task Force, or *DOT Force*, which was created at last year's G8 Summit in Okinawa. The *DOT Force* is a unique partnership among developed and developing countries, and includes leaders from the private sector and NGOs as well. At the Genoa Summit in July, it will provide G8 leaders with a series of strategic recommendations to foster policy, regulatory and networking readiness; improve connectivity, increase access and lower cost; build human capacity; and encourage participation in global e-commerce networks.

The *DOT Force* and other global initiatives must be matched at the field level. UNDP already has considerable success in this area. It has already deployed the first Internet nodes in more than 40 countries and trained more than 25,000 organizations and institutions. In addition, UNDP and the United Nations Volunteers are working with Cisco Systems and others to train students in 24 of the world's least developed countries, so they can build and maintain national Internet infrastructures.

At the same time, we understand that we must practice what we preach. UNDP must lead by example as well as through advocacy and advisory services. That is why I am so proud that the organization is on the cutting-edge in using electronic knowledge networking to share best practices and new ideas across more than 180 countries and territories. That means promising initiatives to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa can be shared with those on the front lines in South Asia. Programmes to provide clean affordable energy to the rural poor in South America can be replicated in the South Pacific. Decision-makers in the Middle East can learn from job creation policies that worked in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.

So those skeptical about the uses of ICT for Development should be answered with humility but also steady determination. Let us make the most of the opportunities this new century has given us to empower the poor and give them real choices for the future. ■

Mark Malloch Brown is the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

INTERVIEW

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien of Canada

In an exclusive interview with CHOICES magazine, Canada's Prime Minister Jean Chrétien speaks about Canada's commitment to the Millennium Summit goal of halving global poverty by 2015, the upcoming G8 Summit, the elimination of landmines, the digital divide and UNDP's Human Development Report.

As a leader in bringing humanitarian and development concerns to bear on global issues such as the battle to halve poverty by 2015 and the fight against HIV/AIDS, what is Canada doing to influence other countries to do more in this area?

Canada has made humanitarian and development concerns a focus of its foreign and international development policies. Our government clearly stated in its 1995 foreign policy statement, *Canada in the World*, that "the purpose of Canadian Official Development Assistance (ODA) is to support sustainable development in developing countries, in order to reduce poverty and contribute to a more secure, equitable and prosperous world."

Canada in the World commits the Canadian Government to providing 25 percent of its ODA to basic human needs: primary health care, basic education, family planning, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation, as well as to responding with humanitarian assistance to emergencies—such as earthquakes in El Salvador and India, and floods in Mozambique.

Last September, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) unveiled its new *Social Development Priorities: A Framework for Action*, which reaffirms Canada's support for the international target of halving extreme poverty by the year 2015. As part of the Framework, CIDA will be doubling the proportion of its resources towards basic education, health and nutrition, HIV/AIDS and child protection. Funding towards HIV/AIDS will actually quadruple by 2005.

We are committed also to working in close collaboration with our international partners. Since its launch, the Canadian Government has been promoting the Framework around the world, both with International Development Banks and other donor countries. We want to encourage them to work more forcefully towards this goal.

Canada is also one of the few countries with the distinction of unilaterally forgiving all of its ODA debts to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). In 1986, we became one of the first countries to provide only grants—that is, no loans at all—in our aid programme. Since that time, we have forgiven over Cdn$1.2 billion (US$1/Cdn$1.57) in ODA debts owed to Canada.

What are your hopes that the forthcoming G8 meeting will bring good news to the world's least developed countries?

Extreme poverty and its consequences are among the most pressing and most difficult problems facing the world. They comprise a principal preoccupation of the multilateral system, including the G8.

The obstacles involved in bringing about sustained and widely shared economic growth and in addressing the multitude of problems related to economic and social development are not easily overcome. However, Canada and the G8 have taken a number of new, concrete actions in recent years that, I believe, will help make a difference.

I've already mentioned efforts to address debt through HIPC, which was initiated by the G8. I have also spoken about the emphasis Canada is giving to social development priorities in its development assistance programmes and about our concern about AIDS and other infectious diseases. The G8 has also taken a leading role on these issues. Following the G8 Summit last year, Japan organized the Okinawa International Conference on Infectious Diseases in December to help spur the development and coordination of national strategies for AIDS research

"The G8 alone cannot bring about the development of the least developed countries. It requires comprehensive action on a broad front of issues. And it's not just about money. It also requires the security and confidence that is produced by good governance."

The G8 is also trying to ensure that the poorest countries will have a greater opportunity to benefit from new information technologies because these technologies will be so important for all economies—large and small—in the coming years. At the Okinawa Summit, we launched the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force, or *DOT Force*, to bring together governments, civil society and the private sector in an effort to increase Internet access around the world.

These are a few examples of G8 initiatives, but we all know the difficulty of changing fundamental realities in the least developed countries and addressing extreme poverty effectively. Only comprehensive action on a wide range of issues can achieve this. And it's not just about money: for example, sustainable economic and social development also require the security and confidence that is produced by good governance.

When we meet this summer in Genoa, Italy, my G8 colleagues and I will continue to focus on the problems of poverty and development. I cannot now elaborate on these future initiatives since they are still under consideration.

How would you explain the decline in ODA during the 1990s, and what is the prognosis for ODA in the first decade of the new Millennium, particularly in the light of discussions concerning the International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Mexico in 2002?

The economic situation of the early 1990s had an effect on all public sector spending in Canada, including its ODA programme. But recently we have taken steps to reverse the decline. In our 2000 budget, my government announced an additional $435 million to the International Assistance Envelope over three years.

The International Conference on Financing for Development deals with many important issues, including increasing ODA. Most of the resources that are needed for meaningful development in a country must be generated privately both from domestic and external sources. This Conference will address the wide range of issues that affect this effort.

How do you explain disparities in the allocation of aid which leave some nations, many in Africa, with a fraction of the donor aid that is actually given to countries in other regions?

I can't speak for other countries, but as far as Canada is concerned, there is no discrepancy. In terms of geographic distribution, in 2000–2001 we have allocated 44 percent of our country-to-country ODA budget to Africa. About 36 percent went to Asia and 20 percent to the Americas. Of the top 25 countries receiving ODA, 16 are in Africa. In keeping with the emphasis Canadians place on focusing on poverty and the poorest, about two-thirds of our bilateral aid programmes are targeted towards the least-developed and low-income countries.

As Prime Minister of one of the more thoughtful donor nations, what might be some benchmarks you would like to see applied in Canada as well as other donor nations to increase the chance of a genuine assault on world poverty?

As I mentioned earlier, Canada is committed to helping halve extreme poverty by 2015, and we are using that as our benchmark. But our commitment to reducing poverty goes beyond words. We are allocating about $2.8 billion for programming in social development priority areas between years 2000 and 2005. My Minister for International Cooperation has undertaken an extensive consultation with her counterparts in other donor countries to work together to make the war on world poverty more effective.

UNDP is a strong proponent of bridging the digital divide. What is Canada doing to help developing countries seize opportunities to benefit from information and communications technologies?

Canada realizes that the extremely rapid evolution of the information and communications technologies sector is creating a digital divide between the developed and the developing countries. This divide is not simply a technological divide but primarily a "knowledge divide," related to access and sharing of information and knowledge, empowerment and governance issues.

We recognize the importance of working with developing countries as partners to bridge the gap. Last year CIDA established the "Knowledge for Development" initiative which is based on the premise that every individual should have the opportunity and capability to access information. This initiative is based on building into our development assistance programmes the ability of our partners in the developing world to access and utilize information and knowledge. Various departments in the Canadian Government are working with each other to share the benefit of Canada's expertise with developing countries. We are also quite active with international stakeholders and we will continue to pursue our activities in harnessing information and knowledge for social and economic development around the world.

Canada spearheaded the movement that led to the adoption of the International Treaty to Ban Landmines. It remains a stalwart leader in the effort to bring about an eventual elimination of landmines from the face of the earth. How is that commitment being played out today?

I am proud that Canada is demonstrating the same leadership in implementing the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines as we did in its development and entry into force. We are continuing to work with like-minded states and civil society partners, such as Mines Action Canada and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, to encourage universal acceptance of the Convention and to further entrench the global norm against anti-personnel mines.

Since 1998, Canada has provided approximately $50 million from the Canadian Landmine Fund to clear mined land, destroy stockpiled mines, assist mine victims and support other mine action initiatives in more than 25 countries.

We realize that our seriousness in addressing the global landmine problem will be measured by our commitment over the long term to implement the Ottawa Convention. Personally, I am committed to ensuring the Convention's success because I am convinced it is making a difference in the lives of countless individuals and communities around the world.

For seven years, Canada has come out No. 1 on the Human Development Index, an annual feature of the *Human Development Report* commissioned by UNDP. How significant is this rating to the people of Canada and the government?

I think it is a source of pride for many Canadians. Certainly it is for me, as Prime Minister. We are proud that Canada ranks so highly on the factors that UNDP measures in creating its index: life expectancy at birth and school enrolment have gone up, while our long-term unemployment rate and the percentage of our population living below the poverty line have gone down.

But while Canadian citizens and the Canadian Government are pleased with what we have managed to achieve, we know full well that we cannot afford to be complacent. We have to continue to improve. We have a great responsibility, not only to all Canadians, but to the less fortunate in the developing world. ■

"Canada realizes that the extremely rapid evolution of the information and communications technologies sector is creating a digital divide between the developed and the developing countries. We will continue to pursue our activities in harnessing information and knowledge for social and economic development around the world."

Contributor: Zakaria Fellah/UN OCHA

Deconstructing the Digital Divide

BY DENIS GILHOOLY

For most of humanity, the information age rhetoric is a far cry from reality. In a world where 80 percent of Internet users live in the richest nations and half the people on the planet have never made a telephone call, bridging the "digital divide" will be an immense task. It will require nothing less than a digital "Marshall Plan" for the 21st Century.

At root it will demand the marriage of the socio-economics of development with the new socio-economics of digital networks, both still highly controversial areas in their own right. Today, the disconnect between the ICT and development sectors is a serious cause for concern.

At the global level, the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force (*DOT Force*) and the United Nations ICT Task Force represent a commitment of the world's most powerful economic trade grouping and the most representative international organization to address the issue of the global digital divide.

But even before the *DOT Force* or the ICT Task Force can deliver recommendations, the following actions are needed: In the area of policies, we need to move much faster in promoting increased competition in the ICT sector. We need to modify wider commercial codes and regulations to prepare for cross-border e-applications.

In the area of programmes, we must incorporate ICT as a major piece of the development portfolio. We need to fully integrate programmes with policy measures and ensure that they are innovative, well matched to local needs, and address market failures, poverty alleviation and social exclusion. Moreover, policies that increase creative cooperation between sectors such as public–private partnerships are necessary for the effective spread and optimal use of ICT as an enabler for development.

Facing the facts head on, there is still a long way to go before fundamental ICT policies or programmes are operative. New evidence and innovative strategic frameworks may well be needed to convince the leaders of developed and developing countries of the urgent need to integrate ICT into development policy. We must make the case in terms compelling enough to elicit the political will to get the job done.

Two issues will need special attention: global governance of the Internet and the future of official development assistance (ODA) in relation to ICT.

Developing countries are already woefully under-represented in the debate on global governance. The notion of operating the Internet in the future as a private non-profit corporation based in the United States, functioning under US law, is plainly unacceptable to developing countries. Here the UN ICT Task Force could play a vital role in promoting the Internet as a global public good.

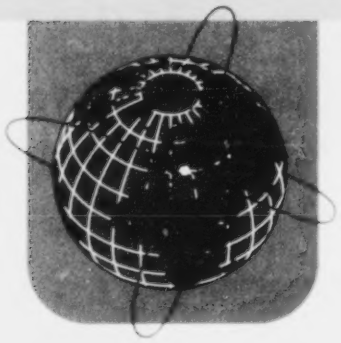
In terms of ODA, most major donor nations are currently struggling with how to incorporate ICT into their broader development strategies. The ODA debate is moving toward understanding ICT as a development objective in tandem with clean water, basic health and primary education.

Which brings us to the *DOT Force*. Fundamentally, the *DOT Force* represents a new structure of global governance based on the notion of inclusion, and comprising all stakeholders—private sector, developed and developing country governments, non-profit organizations, and multilateral institutions. Already, the *DOT Force* is making each player take stock of its own role in bridging the digital divide in a coordinated and effective way.

The final report to be delivered to leaders at the G8 Summit in Genoa, Italy, in July, is likely to contain five or six big ideas that will help mobilize support for sustainable projects on the ground. To support this work, the Digital Opportunity Initiative, a public–private partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Accenture and the Markle Foundation, has provided an innovative framework which positions ICT as an enabler for achieving development goals and helping developing countries be critical players in the new global network economy.

The results remain to be seen. The challenge is immense. A compelling case exists. The sooner the world accepts it, the sooner ICT will play a possibly crucial role in the global effort to reduce poverty and create a better life for all ■

Denis Gilhooly is Senior Adviser to the UNDP Administrator and Director of ICT for Development in UNDP.



BY ALISON MUTLER

WIRED IN ROMANIA: Children's Computer Clubs

"I

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

am Gaby and I learn at school," typed Gabriel Neagu, in slow and careful English on the computer. "I write poetry for children," the 16-year-old with blonde hair and green eyes added shyly, revealing a few verses he had composed in Romanian for children and orphans.

Almost every day Gabriel spends two hours on the computer. "That makes 10 hours a week," he calculated. He wants to be an agent for artists or go into management when he leaves school, and spends his time visiting musical sites on the Internet, which has deepened his knowledge and interest.

On a Saturday morning, Gabriel was one of 10 teenage boys working on the computers at Saint Nicolae Computer Club, each delving deeper into a world of their own creation or selecting a career path for when they leave the orphanage.

Two brothers were using the Paintbrush programme. One was making abstract digital painting with little red and white squares and the other was drawing a dog that bore an uncanny resemblance to Scooby Doo. Two rows away, a 16-year-old was downloading pictures from the summer camp in the exclusive Romanian lakeside resort of Snagov. Another boy was translating from Romanian into English.

When the computer club first opened ... many of the youngsters were reticent and even afraid of the electronic gadgets.

Children and teens learn to navigate the Web, with help from experienced Internet users, at Bucharest's Saint Nicolae Computer Club.

"They love it," said Paul Florea, deputy head of the Andrea Foundation, a Romanian non-governmental organization (NGO) which works in child welfare and that has been instrumental in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project. "They line up and don't even look up when somebody comes into the room."

Two 21-year-old male students, who are in the last year of an electronic and telecommunications degree, instruct and supervise the 15 and 16-year-olds who were using the computers that day.

When the computer club first opened on 23 October 2000, many of the youngsters were reticent and even afraid of the electronic gadgets. Now, they have created their own Web site for the orphanage—a colourful and nifty collage of photos and descriptions of summer camp, their friends and the St. Nicolae orphanage in Bucharest's southwest fifth district.

Computers are relatively new in Romania. Recently, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Adrian Nastase was learning to work with computers in front of the television cameras, with the message: Using a computer counts. At least one minister said it was the first time he had ever used a computer.

In his inauguration speech in December, Romania's President Ion Iliescu called information and communications technology "the foundation for the modernization of the national economy."

St. Nicolae was the first computer club in Romania sponsored by UNDP. So far, 90 children have enrolled, and are receiving training from two instructors on the basic functions of computers, and on how to surf the Web. There are now six clubs in Romania under the same scheme, three of which are in Bucharest, one in Sibiu, a city in Romania's Transylvanian northwest, and two more in Braila in the east.

The idea was jointly conceived by UNDP, the Andrea Foundation, and an American NGO, Children's Help Net Foundation (CHNF). The Andrea Foundation and CHNF received 100 comput-

Now, they have created their own Web site for the orphanage.

UNDP's Kyoko Postill watches a student navigate the Web.

ers from AT&T and software donations from Microsoft and Symantec, which helped them realize the project. UNDP Romania offered financial help and technical assistance and helped them attract resources from other sponsors. MobiFon, a private mobile phone company, supported the initiative by donating 10 computers with licenses and two printers.

Most Romanians, children included, do not have access to computers in this Balkan country where the average monthly salary is US$100 and inflation was more than 40 percent last year. Youngsters who are computer literate, or at least have access to computers, undoubtedly have an advantage in expanding their knowledge, while those who do not have less opportunity for learning.

Educators believe that if children are not given the same opportunity to benefit from information technology, it widens the gap in knowledge and creates inequality.

Computer clubs for children seeks to bridge the digital divide, a challenge in this former communist country seeking to catch up with Western Europe after decades of communism and a painful transition period of more than a decade.

Children living in orphanages, many of whom are not actually orphans, and poor children benefit from the computer clubs which provide access to computers and the Internet. The aim is for the children to become productive, self-supporting members of society, able to fend for themselves.

Costinel Iliescu, a 16-year-old in black jeans and a white teeshirt says he likes using Power Point. "It helps me with my homework," he said with a large smile. "Since I started working with computers when the club opened, it has changed the way I think. I come in here after school."

According to Kyoko Postill, a former Programme Officer in UNDP Romania, by providing these children with access to computers, UNDP is helping narrow the gap between richer children and the less well-off.

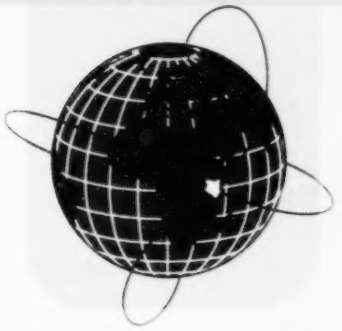
It's certainly widening the children's horizons beyond the dreary prefab building they call home.

Such is the success of the computer club, UNDP Romania is considering to expand this initiative and establish computer clubs for children all over Romania in cooperation with municipalities which are interested in hosting such a club.

The staff have more practical matters on their mind.

"Instead of hanging out on the street, they are occupied now," said Marian Florea, the young administrator at St. Nicolae. "It helps them with geometry, English—everything really. It is a huge advantage." ■

Alison Mutler is the chief correspondent of the Associated Press in Romania.



ISOLATED KENYAN VILLAGE Gets Connected

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DAVID DAHMEN

KAANWA, KENYA

In Kaanwa, a small, isolated village on the slopes of Mount Kenya in this East African country, 800 families have suddenly been given a ray of hope, a chance to expand their marginal incomes. The villagers are building a micro hydro project to get electricity and pump water. Eventually, they will get an Internet connection for virtually unlimited scope of possibilities.

Ignoring the scorching midday heat, hundreds of villagers—husbands, wives and teenagers—struggle to control the waters of the local Tungu River in preparation for the micro hydro development. In the distance, mighty Mount Kenya rises to 5,199 kilometres with its famous snow-capped top. At the site, men, in groups of five, move heavy stones to make the water follow a small, 250-metres-long canal to the Kaburi Falls and a newly-installed turbine, while the women reinforce the walls along the river.

Using available natural resources, the villagers will soon be producing their own energy and piped water. Schools will light up, batteries will be charged, grinding mills will operate, and there will even be a small factory. With funding from the Global Environment Facility/Small Grants Programme, these new facilities will soon become a reality.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a tripartite partnership of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme. Projects and programmes that receive GEF co-financing are developed and implemented in collaboration with one of these three institutions.

"We are very proud and happy to be able do this job ourselves. We don't want anyone else, be it a businessman or a politician, to make this a project of his own," says the chairman of the Village Committee, Fredrick Naku, addressing a crowd of exhausted villagers under a huge fig tree by the river.

The villagers murmur their consent in the local Kimeru language. They are part of a newly formed community cooperative that will own and share the benefits of this micro hydro project. The 150 villagers have taken personal responsibility for the project, having been involved in it from the beginning. They are active shareholders, but no one holds more than 100 shares. Revenues will be distributed evenly once a year.

With his arms full of construction maps, Stephen Gitonga of the Kenya branch of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), consults with some of the village elders on how to proceed. This non-governmental organization, affiliated to ITDG of the United Kingdom, builds on its experiences in similar projects in countries like Nepal, Peru and Sri Lanka. In Kaanwa, the work is carried out in close collaboration with the local community and the Ministry of Energy.

"We scanned most of Kenya for a suitable site, checking 24 possible locations in six months," recalls Gitonga, stressing that the project site would have to fulfil certain criteria. It would have to be a remote community, far from electric power supplies, yet easy to develop.

The choice fell upon Kaanwa, where most of its inhabitants struggle to survive by subsistence farming on plots as small as 0.1 acres. The villagers grow maize, beans and tobacco, and rear some cows and goats.

Catalytic effect

The hydro power project will definitely change the future, according to Nancy Josphia Kabiro and Dionision Nieru, two members of the cooperative. Both believe the energy project will help them survive in this drought prone region. Apart from

Kenyan women work to fill sandbags to reinforce the river bank.

Below left: A turbine.

Below right: A 250-metre-long canal will channel a small amount of the river's water to the turbine, minimizing the potential for environmental damage.

helping Kabiro establish a long desired tailoring business and Nieru a welding service, electricity will open up many other possibilities.

It will now be possible to store heat-sensitive medical supplies in refrigerators in a region suffering from poor health services. There are also plans for an education centre, which will give villagers access to video material on anything, from agricultural extension to HIV/AIDS prevention.

And this is just the beginning.

The IT-age is just around the corner, with cyber cafes flourishing in Nairobi and other Kenyan cities, making the Internet available to everyone. Cell phones are also growing in popularity, with telecom companies displaying colourful ads along the highways. Soon most of the country will be covered.

But from the point of view of the central highlands of Kenya, all this is exclusively for the well-serviced communities along the main road between Nairobi and Meru. Beyond the bumpy, 12-kilometre dirt road connecting Kaanwa to Chuka, radios and some black-and-white TV sets are the only means of information. During the rainy season, even the most sophisticated four-wheel drive cannot make it to the village. This means isolation for weeks and even months.

A profound difference

But electricity will make a profound difference. With power to run computers, even remote villages like Kaanwa will be connected to the Internet, using the mobile net. "This development is of course far away. But once a community gets the means to 'plug in' to the IT world, it all happens very fast," says Gitonga.

The hydro power project in Kaanwa village is one of 15 similar efforts receiving funds from the Small Grants Programme. An amount of US$ 38,000 has been provided for generation of the power and a further $25,000 for distribution, including pumping water to the micro-enterprises to be developed.

The hard work of Kabiro, Nieru and the rest of the villagers to build the power plant has helped cut labour costs by some $7,000. The total value of the villagers' efforts is estimated at $20,000. When ready for use, the environment-friendly micro power project will generate 18 kilowatts.

The Small Grants Programme will support 18 new projects this year, 12 of them in the Mount Kenya area. They all follow the GEF criteria of promoting biodiversity conservation, and mitigation of global warming. This year, some $680,000 have been allocated for the Small Grants Programme in Kenya.

Says Esther Mwangi, programme coordinator of UNDP/GEF projects in Kenya: "This pilot project has had a catalytic effect, influencing the policy dialogue for electricity generation and distribution. The dynamic of the project has also been understood by the European Union, which is committing a large amount of co-financing to develop similar plants in other areas of the country through ITDG and Nottingham Trent University."

A number of environmental benefits are also at hand. "The forest will recover since there will be no tree cutting for curing tobacco," says Chris G. Gakahu, a UNDP programme specialist. "Soil erosion and emission of greenhouse gases will also be reduced."

Says UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Tarirai Isaac Chivore: "There's no doubt that this pilot project will trigger a lot of development. It also fits in very well with the new vision of UNDP, touching on governance, partnership and trust building." ■

David Dahmen is a freelance journalist and photographer based in Sweden. A previous contributor to CHOICES, *he specializes in development issues.*

BEDOUIN WOMEN DISCOVER Distance Learning

BY SEREEN JUMA

SAFAWI, JORDAN

Every day for the last three weeks, Fatima Hassan, 21, has been crossing Baghdad Street—a narrow, truck-infested highway slicing through the middle of the town and stretching towards Jordan's eastern border—to reach the newly-opened Prince Hussein Information Technology Community Centre.

UNV Jenan Shafiq surrounded by her students.

At the modestly-furnished, one-storey building, she seats herself before an IBM Pentium III, types her user name and password and logs into her Hotmail account—all the while tapping her fingers impatiently on the desk. Fatima is anxiously waiting for replies from local universities about enrolling in their distance-learning programmes.

"I want to study geography, and eventually start teaching," Fatima explains, a black veil wrapped around her fair, oval-shaped face. Her family cannot afford to send her to university. The fact that the nearest university was 100 kilometres away also complicates matters in a conservative community where women do not travel on their own.

Surrounded by a vast stretch of desert steppe, the rhythm of life in this desolate Bedouin town of 2,000 skipped a beat when 15 computers arrived last September to establish Jordan's first Information Technology Community Centre (ITCC).

Funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and managed by a grassroots organization, the Badia Research and Development Programme (BRDP), the Safawi Centre is equipped with computers, an Internet line and a printer.

The pilot centre drew a curious crowd from the onset. Many were eager to sign up for computer literacy training and catch their first glimpse of the World Wide Web. Still others, like Fatima, wanted to use the new technology to get a formal education, market local handicrafts and glean information to support their livelihoods.

The architect of ITCC is the Royal Commission for Information Technology, a partnership between the Government of Jordan, BRDP, UNDP and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. According to Khaled Toukan, Minister of Education and head of the commission, the strategic importance of such centres lies in "transforming Jordanian society into the digital age and eliminating the digital divide."

A personal crusade

Barely a year after ascending the throne, King Abdallah II was standing behind a podium, warning corporate and political leaders at the 2000 World Economic Forum in Davos about the widening digital gap. The 39-year-old monarch made bridging this gap a personal crusade in his natural resource-poor country of five million.

Since Davos, he has personally presided over the opening of six new centres across the country, and is aggressively pushing for more to be established as quickly as possible. He has called for English classes to be offered from the first grade, and computer training from the second, to pave the way for this expansion.

With an adult literacy rate of 89 per cent—among the highest in the Arab world—Jordanians are already poised to develop their ICT skills. But they have to overcome the language barrier posed by the English language content of most Web sites by creating more Web sites in Arabic.

Women participate

"Until recently, women used to avoid crossing Baghdad Street on their own," says Jenan Shafiq, a local United Nations Volunteer (UNV), recruited by UNDP as part of the United Nations Information Technology Services (UNITeS) initiative. Separate training sessions were organized for men and women to accommodate the practice of gender segregation in the culture.

"It can be too expensive and time-consuming to visit a doctor outside of Safawi, so residents can now e-mail them with specific concerns."

After visiting nearly 100 homes, Shafiq quickly discovered that women were particularly interested in health issues, such as osteoporosis, cancer and skin ailments caused by the harsh desert climate. She told them the World Wide Web had answers to their questions. "It can be too expensive and time-consuming to visit a doctor outside of Safawi, so residents can now e-mail them with specific concerns," says Shafiq.

Slowly, the women of Safawi—many with their daughters—began to cross from one side of the room to the other, to sign up for classes, check their e-mails and browse Arabic language Web sites on health, news, religion, education, poetry and entertainment.

Community development rationale

"What makes JITCCs different from an Internet café is their integration of capacity-building and community development," explains Costante Mizzau, UNDP Resident Representative in Jordan. "If members of the community can turn to Web sites to learn the latest techniques on breeding livestock, access new teaching modules or sell their products through the Internet, then we will have contributed to the national efforts to bridge the digital gap."

Today, the Royal Commission for Information Technology is being inundated with requests from communities to help them establish a JITCC. In five years, 1,000 centres are slated to open in urban and rural areas—all interconnected to a national network and offering standardized products and services.

"If I wanted to launch such a centre on my own, it would take 20 years," says Falah Awad, director of JITCC in Mo'agar, a semi-urban community 30 kilometres east of the capital, Amman. Due to popular demand, his centre is now open seven days a week until 9:00 pm catering mainly to students and researchers.

Trakan is not surprised by this thirst for knowledge and enthusiastic response towards JITCCs. "The Jordanian community is very much in resonance with the leadership," he explains. "They know that information technology opens up a new world, new horizons."

No longer remote

Dust will never settle the same again in the Bedouin enclave of Safawi. It is women's day at the centre. As noon approaches, the room is filled with second grade students from an all-girls school scheduled for a training session.

"We need faster Internet connectivity so it doesn't take as long to access our e-mail account," Fatima says assertively.

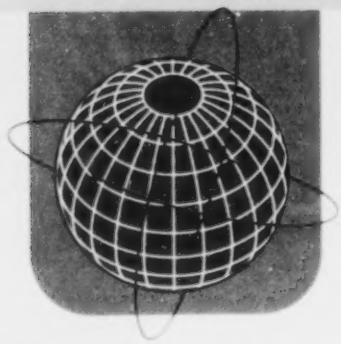
Hela, a young mother seated next to her, nods in agreement. "The Internet is supposed to reduce the distance between people and make it easier to communicate," she says as she prepares to send an e-mail to relatives in another city.

It is apparent that visitors to the centre have crossed more than just Baghdad Street. This exchange would hardly sound unusual, had it not been resonating from a remotely-placed locale in the Kingdom of Jordan, where Bedouin women are resolutely starting to cross the digital divide. ■

Seven Jansa is the Communications Officer in UNDP Jordan.

Top: Safawi girls cluster around a monitor, connected to a wider world.

The Information Technology Community Centre in Jordan's capital, Amman.



CAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Help Fight Disease?

BY ANDY CRUMP AND CATHY NEEDHAM

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Knowledge can be a powerful remedy for disease. In the digital age, information and communications technologies (ICT) have become the ideal means to disseminate and acquire knowledge.

But can ICT be used in developing countries, by the poor or marginalized, the very people that face the worst impact of diseases? Some examples from the work of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) would indicate that the answer might well be yes.

TDR, a knowledge management partnership, was created in 1975 to combat neglected infectious diseases. Its co-sponsors are the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. TDR's goals (www.who.int/tdr) are to develop new preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic tools, train young scientists and strengthen institutions to help build research capacity in disease-endemic countries.

Working with a wide range of interdisciplinary additional partners, TDR has already helped move four tropical diseases—leprosy, onchocerciasis, Chagas disease and lymphatic filariasis—to the brink of elimination as public health problems. Over the last 15 years, no small part of TDR's success has been its wholehearted embrace of the digital age and the use of ICT to help achieve its goals.

Connecting the unconnected

Today it is possible to diagnose patients in the field via real-time video connections with experts in distant countries. And scientists in institutes in Africa can now get almost instantaneous access to the very latest genome information in online databases. Such breakthroughs are the result, in part, of work that TDR and other partners began almost a decade ago.

TDR and others teamed up with Satellite in the early 1990s to provide support for the launch of a low-orbiting satellite, HealthSAT II. With the installation of simple ground stations and equipment, rural institutes in Africa, such as the Itakara Research Centre in Tanzania, gained access to e-mail and other vital applications. By mid-1993, 11 developing countries were connected to medical databases in the North—and to each other—via Satellite technologies.

Satellite is an international non-governmental organization (www.healthnet.org) which uses satellite, telephone and Internet technologies to serve the health communication and information needs of countries in the developing world.

As communication capabilities in disease endemic countries improved, and use of the World Wide Web spread in the mid 1990s, TDR shifted its emphasis towards efforts to provide full Internet access to African scientists. TDR also began to investigate ways of providing full-text access to scientific papers and to train scientists in using the Web for research.

Controlling schistosomiasis in China

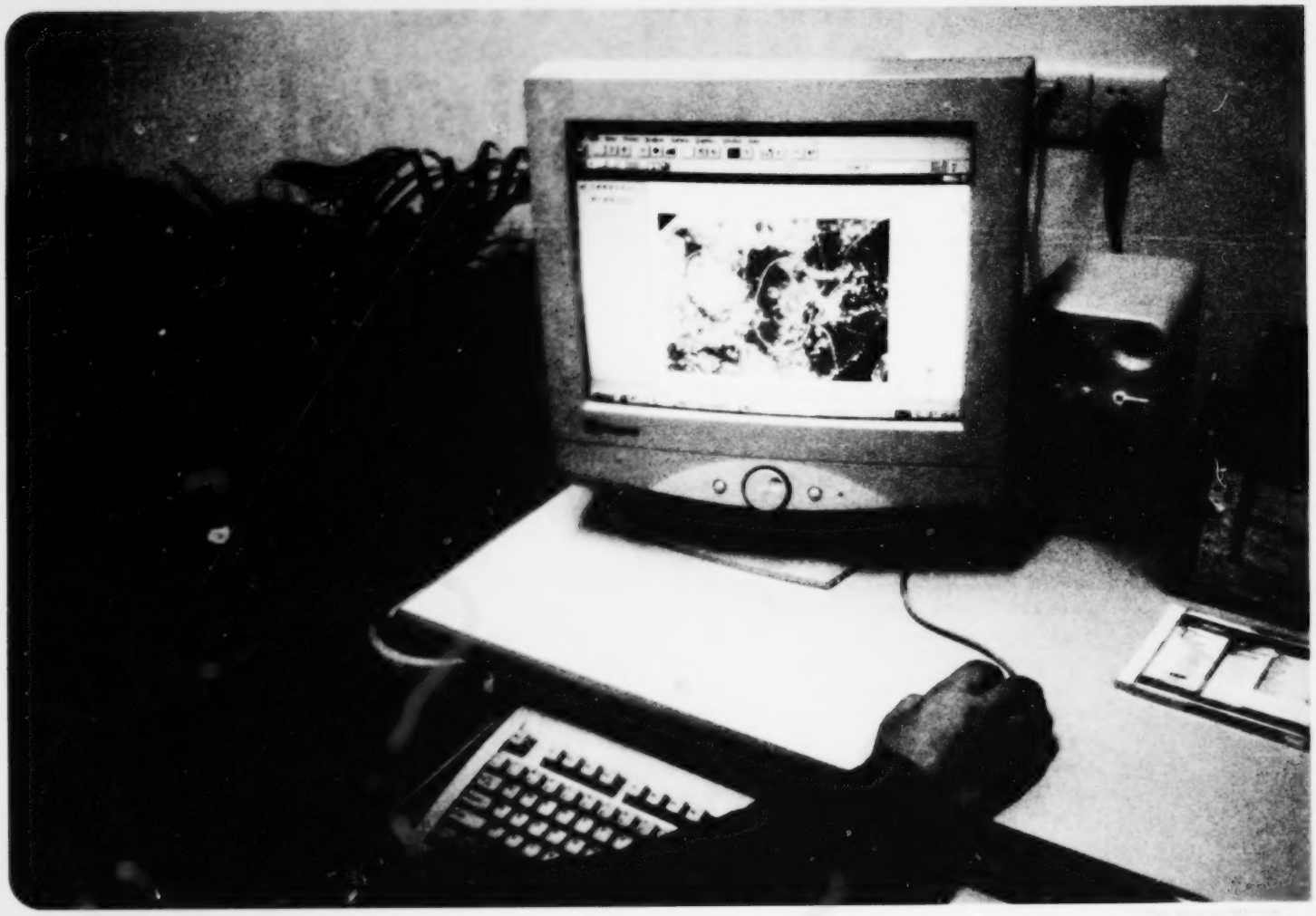
In the mid-1990s, TDR supported a high-technology project that proved to be highly successful in fighting schistosomiasis in China. The project has excellent prospects for adaptation to other disease control needs.

Schistosomiasis is one of TDR's 10 target diseases. A debilitating and chronic illness, people become infected through contact with snail-infested water (snails are intermediate hosts in the life cycle of the flatworm parasite that causes the disease). Once infected, sufferers are seriously weakened by the disease, which can lead to serious intestinal, liver and urinary complications.

The China project, led by Professor Zhou Xiao-Nong of the Jiangsu Institute for Parasitic Diseases, took satellite data and plugged it into a custom-built computer model, creating a geographic information system for predicting high-risk areas for schistosomiasis transmission in the lower Yangtze River Basin.

The model was extended to predict the impact of floods, dam construction and global warming on disease transmission, resulting in cost-effective targeting of prevention and treatment measures.

TDR has already helped move four tropical diseases—leprosy, onchocerciasis, Chagas disease and lymphatic filariasis—to the brink of elimination.



Today, these state-of-the-art mapping technologies are being used as monitoring, surveillance and evaluation tools in China's national schistosomiasis control programme, and the techniques are being applied in other health fields, such as malaria control.

Bridging the medical digital divide

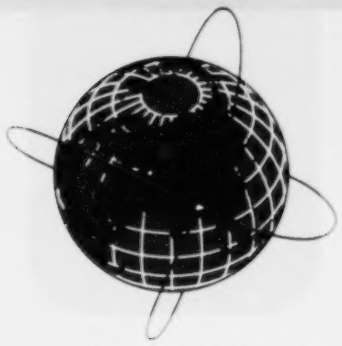
The early Internet connectivity projects which benefited TDR scientists have led to an expansion of efforts to cross the medical digital divide. Thanks to support from many other actors and partners, a growing global network of scientists is now able to communicate and exchange information in an effective and relatively inexpensive manner. And their knowledge is being brought to bear on disease control initiatives and spreading the use of existing resources, tools and knowledge.

TDR has also expanded its own electronic communications resources, which now include a listserv, audiovisuals and image library, CD-ROMs and a multimedia Web site. This complex serves target audiences throughout the world and enables more and more researchers to reach each other. An electronic voice is now available to researchers and scientists living in disease endemic nations, and the result is meaningful two-way communication.

TDR is now placing emphasis in areas with emerging, as yet untapped potential where TDR has a comparative advantage, such as computational biology for genomics, and is focusing efforts on its substantial and expanding network of scientists from disease endemic countries. ■

Jiangsu Institute for Parasitic Diseases: Professor Zhou Xiao-Nong works with one of the modular components of the Geographical Information System for Schistosomiasis on his computer. The use of Geographical Information Systems, exploiting satellite data, in the monitoring and control of schistosomiasis has been pioneered at the institute.

Andy Crump is a multimedia specialist and Cathy Needham is Web editor in the Communications Unit in the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases at the World Health Organization in Geneva.



BHUTAN JOINS the Digital Age

BY SIOK SIAN PEK

THIMPHU, BHUTAN

When Rinchen Palden touched a computer keyboard for the first time last July, little did she know that she was becoming part of Bhutan's digital history.

"Before this project of free access to the Internet, I knew nothing about the computer or of the world of Internet," the Nima High School student says.

Rinchen, 17, was one of 1,300 high school students and unemployed youths in a pilot training initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aimed at promoting information technology (IT) in a country largely known for its exotic inaccessibility. And because there was no limit on the number of visits to Thimphu's four Internet cafés, one student participated 154 times during the eight-week pilot project. A second batch of youths and schoolteachers were given access earlier this year as they learned to surf the Internet and use e-mail.

Now, Rinchen visits an Internet café every Saturday to e-mail a group of friends studying in India. Sonam Dawa surfs the Internet to share the latest NBA basketball results with his friends. Sixteen-year-old Kiran Chetri hopes to become a Web designer when he gets older.

"We are very cognizant of UNDP's promise that we will take the lead in bringing new information technologies to remote parts of the world," says Shun-ichi Murata, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator in Bhutan. "This is an exciting prospect, especially here where the rugged terrain is a significant impediment to obtaining information for the vast majority of people. We want to ensure a brighter future for the men, women and youths of Bhutan by providing access to IT and by helping to close the global information gap."

But the digital divide could not be more formidable than the chasm that the Kingdom of Bhutan faces as it enters the global society. Barely four decades ago, there were no roads, electricity, telephones or printed currency in Bhutan. Even today, about 80 percent of the population are farmers who have not used a telephone, much less seen a computer.

The last vestiges of Bhutan's physical isolation were removed when Internet and television were both introduced in June 1999. Bhutanese planners believe that information and communications technology, or ICT, is the long-awaited answer to its most difficult challenge: the highly mountainous terrain and scattered population. "ICT is an industry where young Bhutanese can learn the latest and the best and be on an equal footing with everyone else," says Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and head of the Bhutanese Government.

UNDP has supported Bhutan's ICT sector by helping to establish Druknet, at a cost of US$115,000. It is the nation's only Internet Service Provider, which now boasts 800 subscribers and an estimated 2,500 Internet users. UNDP also funded the training of telecommunication staff and last year helped establish the government's Department of Information Technology, which will promote IT development nationwide.

At the same time, Bhutan is finalizing an IT master plan that envisions IT as an important tool toward achieving the country's overarching development goal of Gross National Happiness, broadly understood as a combination of economic development, environmental conservation and the promotion of national traditions and culture. Within this plan, IT will enhance good governance, generate employment and improve the quality of life of the people through programmes such as telemedicine and distance learning.

In 2002, IT will be an even more important element of UNDP's support to Bhutan. "Improving public access to knowledge is part of our strategy to promote governance," says Shun-ichi Murata. "We want to induce a demand for IT in the rural areas. This will be very important. But it will also pose a big challenge."

UNDP's Information Network for Good Governance programme at Bhutan's Planning Commission is expected to provide the basis for strengthening decentralized planning. The $450,000 programme, with funding from the Japan Human Resources Development Fund, will help establish regional information hubs and public access points in all of the country's 20 districts.

Another important area of assistance is the fielding of United Nations Volunteer (UNV) IT specialists in key sectors under UNITeS (UN Information Technology Services), a global initiative of UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan that engages volunteers to help bridge the digital divide. UNV was designated the lead agency for this initiative, which is funded by the Government of Japan. Bhutan became a pilot country last August. Ten

The last vestiges of Bhutan's physical isolation were removed when Internet and television were both introduced in June 1999.

IT experts are now involved in all areas of IT development, from policy development to technical support, networking, teaching and Web design.

Many of these initiatives would not have taken off if not for the participation of Rinchen and her fellow youths in the first Internet cafe initiative in July 2000, which was intended then as a low-cost, high-impact pilot activity. It relied on the active involvement of private-sector Internet access providers and was largely self-managed.

Perhaps the most important objective of the project was to enhance the skills of youths in an effort to address the rapidly growing problem of lack of appropriate employment in the country. An estimated 20 percent of high school graduates are jobless, in part because of the mismatch between skills that students have versus what potential employers expect them to have.

UNDP purchased hourly blocks of Internet access time at a fixed rate directly from the access providers, who set aside a specified number of computers for the purpose, as well as full-time assistants who could answer queries. Access ranged from 56 to 84 hours weekly, including lengthy access on weekends and evenings.

Youths were given Internet Access Cards that permitted them to go to any facility during the sponsored hours and use its computers and Internet access free of charge. Participants were first required to complete a form on their IT background. New and returning users were tracked, and the tutors were thus able to identify actual skills of the students and their needs.

Based on repeated requests from students, the second Internet cafe was started in February 2001, for a six week period. With contributions from the United Nations Children's Fund, it was extended for two more weeks to target over 250 teachers from across the country. This coincided with the winter school break. A surprising number of students from outside Thimphu participated. In one cafe, 35 percent of the participants came from other regions, including remote districts, demonstrating that access to information outside Thimphu is equally sought after.

Meanwhile, the Bhutanese Government has no doubt that ICT is the medium to "reach the unreached." Ambitious plans have been drawn up to introduce IT in all high schools and eventually to reach all students.

"The political commitment in Bhutan is an advantage to ICT development," says Atsuko Okuda, a UNDP Programme Officer. "The population is young, eager to learn and fluent in English. I am optimistic that it will take off."

However, Bhutan still needs to overcome many basic problems to exploit the full potential of ICT. The cost of IT equipment is beyond the reach of average citizens, and computer literacy is low even among the 54 percent of adult population with some education. Local content and software are lacking. There are fewer than 5,000 computers in the country. The shortage of ICT skills, policies and legislation is acute. Even electricity is available only to 30 percent of the population.

These challenges are not new to Bhutan, a late starter in the process of planned development. For now, it is the Bhutanese youth who identify best with the information revolution. Back at the Internet cafe, 17-year-old Dechan Doma cannot conceal her excitement as she awkwardly manipulates the mouse on a tea-stained pad.

"My parents, even my older brother, will never ever understand this," she says. "But I realize that my generation will have no career, no life, without information technology." ■

Sisk Suan Pek produces radio and TV programmes for broadcast stations in Asia, including Bhutan and Singapore. Her articles on development have appeared in The Asian Wall Street Journal.

POST-MITCH Networking Expands

BY KRISTIN HELMORE

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS

In November 1998, after Hurricane Mitch decimated some two million homes in Honduras, Candelario Reyes sent a fax. Mr. Reyes is co-coordinator of a cultural centre in Honduras' mountainous Santa Barbara region. He sought help for 2,200 villagers packed together in makeshift shelters without enough food, clean water, blankets or medicines.

Mr. Reyes addressed his fax to a Honduran non-governmental organization (NGO) called *Asociacion Compartir*. Compartir is a member of RDS, the Sustainable Development Network of Honduras, which provides e-mail service, Internet access and especially information to hundreds of organizations, most of them NGOs.

Compartir's director immediately sent an e-mail message to a list of RDS members, explaining that Compartir would act as a conduit for all forms of assistance for the displaced families of Santa Barbara. One of the organizations on RDS' list was the Committee for Honduran Relief in Washington, DC.

In less than four hours, an e-mail from Committee headquarters announced that a cheque for US$15,000 would soon arrive for food, medicines, blankets and improved shelter for the families. Additional supplies would follow shortly.

Empowering civil society

This is one of many examples of emergency networking provided by RDS Honduras (www.rds.org.hn) in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, the worst natural disaster to hit Honduras in the 20th Century.

"We put people who had information in touch with people who needed it, and people who needed something in touch with people who had the resources," says Raquel Isaula Peralta, Manager of RDS. "Mitch really transformed us into the information system of civil society."

During the six months following the hurricane, membership in the RDS network grew from 360 organizations to 449, scattered throughout almost all of Honduras' 18 provinces. Today it has more than 600 member organizations.

RDS moved into new, larger offices in June 2000. It now has 19 staff members, 28 computers, 75 phone lines and is financially independent. In its new "telecentre," which is open to the public six days a week, more than 100 young people a day pay a modest fee for training in the use of e-mail and the Internet.

RDS was launched in 1994 with a two-year grant of $200,000 from UNDP's Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP), and a mandate to facilitate access to information about sustainable development among key stakeholders in the country. It made a priority of targeting NGOs, offering communications and networking services that were unavailable or unaffordable from other providers.

At the time, there were no other national Honduran e-mail providers. Even today, RDS is the only server that provides e-mail access, independent of international Internet lines, to those of its members who otherwise lack the technical capacity to connect to the Internet. Internet access

... the RDS network grew from 360 organizations to 449, scattered throughout almost all of Honduras' 18 provinces.

Hurricane Mitch threw Honduras into a prolonged emergency which ICT helped to address. Today's resulting connectivity helps the country address a growing range of concerns.

Training and outreach

Most NGOs, the largest sector of RDS users, are outside the government. The Ministry of Education, for example, has more than 50 interconnected offices and projects, each with E-mail service provided by RDS. "We work hard to establish good relations with the government," says Raquel Landa. "Since March, they understand that IT is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity."

VIEWPOINT

The ICT for Development Challenge: Rhetoric into Reality

BY RAFAL ROHOZINSKI

"Everyone, everywhere should be enabled to participate in and no one should be excluded from the benefits of the global information society."

—OKINAWA CHARTER ON GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY, 2000

In the year since the G8 declared its determination to bring the benefits of the global information revolution to "everyone everywhere," interest in the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) for development has grown dramatically. No longer is this debate confined to the techno-elitists of the early 1990s, when ICT were touted as a magic panacea capable of solving virtually every problem, overcoming poverty, and transforming the world into a better, more equitable place.

Today, the challenges are tempered by at least some appreciation of the complexities that can hinder effective ICT-for-development. As an important enabler of development, ICT can hardly guarantee successful results.

ICT and democracy

A recent study by the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland, found that, among countries with similar levels of per capita income, those that received greater benefits from ICT also upheld democratic rights, civil liberties, respect for property rights, rule of law, and had high levels of investment in human capital and low levels of corruption.

While the linkages are complex, these findings illustrate an extension of the old debate: ICT is the handmaiden of democracy. Perhaps democracy is the hand-maiden of ICT for development.

Of course, the global project of ICT for development is still in its infancy. This may be an "optimistic" conclusion with which to start, as data on ICT for development projects is hard to come by. A recent European Commission review found that it was "all but impossible to obtain useful data on ICT projects" and impossible to obtain data on ICT impacts other than at project

NOTEBOOK

Netaid Launches *Say Yes for Children* Campaign

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Netaid, an Internet partnership of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Cisco Systems, has added e-advocacy to its online platform for learning, donating and volunteering to help end extreme poverty. It has now also become the online hub of the Global Movement for Children (GMFC) in which hundreds of non-governmental and other organizations (NGOs) are uniting in an urgent campaign to highlight children's unmet rights in every corner of the planet. The campaign was launched on 26 April 2001.

The goal, between now and the 30th United Nations General Assembly session in September 2001, is to capture millions of signatures from the general public, endorsing the specific rights upheld in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all 189 UN member states. By adding advocacy to its online toolbox, Netaid expects to bring an unprecedented body of public opinion on social development issues to the doorsteps of national and international policymakers.

While all but two UN member states have agreed to follow the principles established under the 1989 Convention, child rights advocates have long felt the need for a much louder voice to lift nations' best intentions from the realm of political and legislative discussion into the more active orbit of civil society.

The World Wide Web was unavailable in the late 1980s when the historic Convention was framed. In recent years, advocates for human rights have been empowered by the Internet in ways unimagined back then. Information and opinions can be shared much more widely and online campaigning can hold policymakers more accountable for their actions or lack thereof.

Pledge for children's rights

Netaid.org will act as the online channel for a children's rights campaign to promote awareness and involvement on the Internet. The centrepiece of this effort is the *Say Yes to Children* campaign based on a 10-point pledge for children's rights. The *Say Yes* Pledge states:

I believe that all children should be free to grow in health, peace and dignity, and that we must:
Leave no child out
Put children first
Care for every child
Fight HIV/AIDS
Stop harming and exploiting children
Educate every child
Protect children from war
Protect the earth for children
Fight poverty, starting with children

People with access to the Internet will be encouraged to key in their pledges. Those without computers or access will be asked to fill in a paper form, and their opinions will be entered into Netaid's *Say Yes* database. The full weight and diversity of the final national and global tallies will be presented to world leaders attending the General Assembly Special Session on Children's Rights (19-21 September 2001).

The "buck" however will not stop there.

Those signing in the *Say Yes* pledge will be asked to enter their name, age and gender and to identify the three issues they feel are most urgent. The disaggregation of these localized opinions on children's rights, will give national and international organizations a more accurate picture of public priorities and aspirations and will hopefully enable them to respond with more precise programming, financial assistance, education and public information. The public will also be asked if they would like to do something more to support the Global Movement for Children campaign.

Universal input

"This is a first step towards universal input into global issues," says David Morrison, President of the Netaid.org Foundation. "Many of the voices captured on the *Say Yes* pledges will be registered in the court of public opinion for the first time."

The Global Movement will press its child rights advocacy into remote areas, recording views as seen from the perspective of a villager in Nepal or Sudan. The reach of this campaign, online and offline, will enable Netaid.org to capture the opinions of children and adults and break them down by age and gender.

The data will give NGOs a powerful edge for their own campaigns. "We have a chance to deliver to national and world leaders, voices and opinions never before expressed so directly by their people," says Morrison. "If ever there was a shout that could be heard around the world, this will be it."

As *Say Yes* pledges roll in, www.netaid.org will track and display data on an interactive map of the world. The map will also register the three most urgent child rights issues from the perspective of the citizens in each nation.

This e-advocacy platform and a GMFC Web site developed by Netaid and a coalition of partners, effectively marks the 11th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The partners include the United Nations Children's Fund, World Vision, Save the Children, Plan International, CARE and the Bangladesh Rural Action Committee.

The online capacity that the platform brings is expected to be a model for further campaigns around other major global issues. Says Morrison: "Netaid will be able to read the pulse of public opinion in places where questions were never asked, much less heard. We hope that by doing this in real time, and by posting those viewpoints on the Internet, we will be a catalyst to even greater global action."

Say Yes for Children at www.gmfc.org or at www.netaid.org ■

— Bo Lee Stoll, radio station media relations at Netaid.org

Computer Skills Empower Women

Above: Sister Mary Galeone instructs Leunczie Cadely in the use of a UNDP-supplied computer.

Laura Farrow's daughter draws at a table while her mother masters the use of the PC.

For a Better World

- Shoe manufacturing for handicapped people in Tuum-Tuumdé
- Elementary school Wend-Zoodo in Ouagadougou
- Maternity center Hargo/ Loroum Titao
- Creative workshops for a Ouagadougou school
- Rural ambulance in Saia

Logitech

Think of all the ideas you put on paper.
In China, that's a lot of paper.

That's why we helped Asia Pulp and Paper build the fastest mill in the world. ABB also created a new generation of integrated automation that can monitor and operate the entire plant from a single screen.

At ABB, we believe the most important thing we build today is knowledge. Because the power that will drive the next hundred years is the power of ideas.

www.abb.com

Brain Power. ABB

UNDP GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

Witnessing the Impact of Partnerships

"It's important to involve both men and women. Fathers and husbands have a role in female education."

Danny Glover and Hussein Fahmy, (to Glover's left) look at the model for the Egyptian Media Production City.

Building and witnessing the impact of partnerships between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Egypt, Israel and the United States was the central theme of my trip to the region in February 2001.

I was travelling at the invitation of the US Embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv as a speaker for their African-American Heritage Month activities. I was also visiting in my dual capacities as an actor and UNDP Global Goodwill Ambassador. What I do as an artist is enriched by what I do as a human being.

Being at the cradle of civilization and celebrating African-American history month was special. As I toured the new Library of Alexandria, called the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina*, being developed by UNDP, I saw Egypt's past glory, present struggles and the potential it has to grow in the future. I found myself celebrating the month of February in a way that I had never done.

UNDP and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization joined the Government of Egypt to surmount the disaster caused by the fire that burned down the old library nearly 2,000 years ago and its further destruction in later centuries. UNDP financed an international architectural competition for the design and construction of the building.

The Bibliotheca project seeks to establish a seat of learning, with a major public research library, and to restore Alexandria's reputation for scholarship and knowledge. This will encourage the cultural development of Egypt, the whole of the Mediterranean area, Africa and the Arab world. The library is very impressive, and I believe it will re-establish Egypt as the premier learning centre of the world.

Together with UNDP Regional Goodwill Ambassador for the Arab States and actor Hussein Fahmy, we visited a family development project UNDP has launched with the Social Fund for Development in Giza. The project aims to improve the health and socio-economic conditions of young families by promoting the concept of small families and by supporting micro-enterprise activities and programmes, which will increase their standard of living.

We also listened to a presentation by the National Council on Women (NCW) on its programmes for women's advancement and empowerment. UNDP is coordinating the work of UN agencies in support of NCW.

I met a woman who wove rugs to increase her family's income. Her success made me realize the need for greater participation around the world. Part of my role as Goodwill Ambassador is to use my visibility to increase support for these programmes.

Meeting and seeing women striving for their own betterment reminded me of my own mother's commitment to progress and gender equality. I applauded the vigilance and vision of the assembled women and told them to pass it down to their daughters and change the perception of their sons. I assured them that they could change men's attitudes. It's important to involve both men and women. Fathers and husbands have a role in female education.

While in Cairo and Alexandria, fellow actor, Felix Justice of San Francisco, California, and I performed "An Evening with Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King, Jr." at the US Ambassador's residence, Cairo American College, Heliopolis Public Library and Alexandria University, in recognition of African-American Heritage Month.

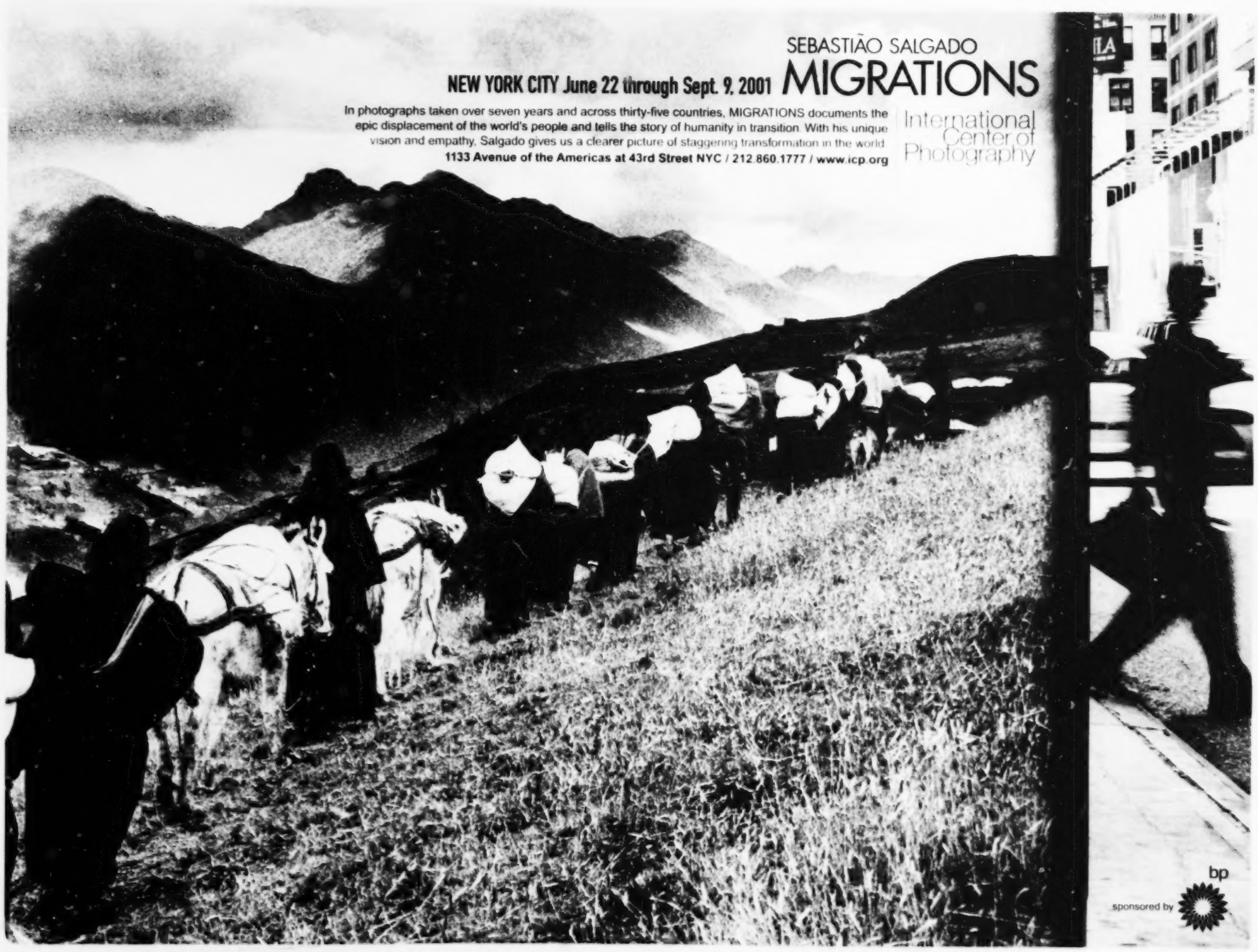
Through their craft and their lives, writer Langston Hughes and civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr. joined other African-Americans like Paul Robeson, Maya Angelou, Ralph Bunche, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali and Rosa Parks in fighting for peace, not only in the United States, but around the world.

In order to accomplish their goals, they built partnerships and coalitions that stretched beyond the African-American community in the United States to encompass a spectrum of cultures and people.

This visit had a profound effect on me. My role as UNDP's Goodwill Ambassador allows me to bear witness to the role UNDP plays in bettering the condition of all human beings. People are taking control of their lives. I'm here to spread those stories to the world. ■

Danny Glover visits a family development project that UNDP has launched with the Social Fund for Development in Giza.

Danny Glover is UNDP Global Goodwill Ambassador.


SEBASTIÃO SALGADO
MIGRATIONS
NEW YORK CITY June 22 through Sept. 9, 2001
In photographs taken over seven years and across thirty-five countries, MIGRATIONS documents the epic displacement of the world's people and tells the story of humanity in transition. With his unique vision and empathy, Salgado gives us a clearer picture of staggering transformation in the world.
1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street NYC / 212.860.1777 / www.icp.org
International Center of Photography
bp
sponsored by

MATTERS OF FACT

ICT and Employment.

While 70% of the European Union's (EU) workers are involved in **technology-intensive** occupations, over half the world's population has yet to make a phone call.

• In early 2001, some 160 million younger workers were **unemployed**, two-thirds in Asia.

About 500 million workers earn too little to keep their families above the **US$1 a day** poverty line. • Barely 6% of the world's people are **Internet** users. And 88% of them are in industrialized countries.

Two phones per person are the norm in the industrialized world. In Africa there are fewer than 14 million **phones** for a population of over 700 million.

Over the last 4 years in India, an estimated 250,000 jobs for **women** were created in the mobile telephony sector. In the Caribbean, some 5,000 women found new work in the **data processing** industry during the 1990s.

About 75% of all Internet information is produced in just one **language**: English.

There is a glaring **gender-related** digital divide in developed and developing countries: 38% of Internet users in Latin America are women, 25% in the EU, 19% in Russia, 18% in Japan and 4% in the Middle East.

Information is drawn from the *World Employment Report* 2001, published by the International Labour Organization. The Report (www.ilo.org/public/english/support/publ/wer/index2.htm) deals with work life in the information economy.

undp Partnerships to Fight Poverty
United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

16240 FIRST CLASS
MS. SANDRA ROBINSON PRODUCTION EDITOR
READEX
MAIN STREET
CHESTER, VT 05143
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA